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Martin Luther King's Dream: After Five Decades

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I want to approach the subject by introducing the main themes of three books that have been published recently in the U.S. The first book was written by Richard Lischer, professor at the Duke Divinity School, Duke University, in North Carolina.

> Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Word that Moved America*, Oxford University Press, Inc., New York, 1995 (tr. by Hisashi Kajiwara and published by the Publishing Bureau, UCCJ, 2012).

This book has a number of essential points, the first of which is that the secret of the impact of Martin Luther King's speeches that led the American civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s lay in his "black preaching" as the nucleus of an oral culture in contrast to the rationalistic white culture of logic.

This characteristic of black preaching cannot be merely grasped in that separated relationship between the teacher and students in school classes. It is rather grasped in its identification as the "call and response" in black gospel music. In other words, it can be described as "communal preaching." It is the author's contention that those mass meetings in the civil rights movement can be characterized as the true "black church communities," existing outside of the ordinary church service.

> As the Movement spread throughout the South so did the meetings. John Lewis observed that they were attended by sharecroppers, the poor, and common folk because the meetings were held in church, and the people felt at home in church. Only in the sanctuary could one experience the religious expression of all that is wrong with this world *and* the hope for dramatic change. These meetings were *church*, and for some who had grown disillusioned with Christian otherworldliness, they were better than church.[1]

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1. Lischer, *The Preacher King*, 245.

Lischer further points out an example in his description of the first mass meeting at Holt Street Baptist Church as follows:

> There is more to the speech, but at King's evocation of the race's collective weariness with the everyday humiliations of its existence, the audience takes over. At the conclusion of the set piece, the audience responds with three minutes of sheer joy in hearing its own truth.
> Out of the deafening applause, shouts of "*King! King!*" can be heard in the church. From this point on, the speech becomes the creature of the speaker *and* his audience. Midway through the speech, King summarized the grounds on which the boycotters may claim righteousness for this protest. In doing so, he provokes a second eruption of joy. Both the style and the content of this summary contain the seeds of all future appeals and arguments for freedom.
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> If we are wrong, the Supreme Court of this nation is wrong.
> If we are wrong, the Constitution of the United States is wrong.
> If we are wrong, God Almighty is wrong.
> If we are wrong, Jesus of Nazareth was merely a utopian dreamer and never came down to earth....
> We are determined… to fight until "justice runs down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream."
>
> With each sentence, his voice soars into a high register, reaching its topmost note on the second syllable of al-*might*-y and then descending into the pandemonium of the crowd's response. His summary is arranged in order of authority from the decision of a human court to the incarnation of the Son of God. The piece ends with his favorite quotation from the prophet Amos, who twenty-eight centuries earlier had stood in the shrine at Bethel and denounced a government that was destroying poor farmers.[2]

The second focal point that I was awakened to is that the author distinguishes King's thought characteristics between, before, and after the "I Have a Dream" speech. According to the author, for the first decade of his career, King devoted himself to aligning the aims of his movement with the values of white America: realizing the integrated society with the message of the Bible.

> His goal was the merger of black aspirations into the American dream. To do this he had to convince black Americans that his methods represented their best interests, and he had to convince white Americans that his vision was consistent with their heritage and in their best interests as well. Due to the growing influence of television, which allowed a Negro unprecedented access to white audiences (*Meet the Press, The Tonight Show*), and his own intellectual background and rhetorical

2. Ibid., 87 f.

> gifts, which granted him unprecedented credibility with white audiences, he carried out his mission of identification before a vast racially mixed audience. Even when he spoke to exclusively black or white audiences, he was in a very real sense addressing the vexingly mixed audience that is America. If that were not complexity enough, he campaigned for identification as a man of dark color in one of the most color-obsessed nations in the world.[3]

However, Lischer contends that in the latter half of the 1960s, after his "Dream" speech, King's idealistic and moralistic stance came to a definite standstill.

> In his final sermon to Ebenezer, King announces that the dream is dead. Throughout this last period of his life, his sermons reflect his growing disillusionment with white America. With the urban riots, the white backlash had set in. The war in Vietnam had undercut his earlier reliance on democratic ideals and served to remind him that the ideals themselves were suspect, that white America had been born in genocide and slavery. In those days, King's rage was second to none, neither Stokely Carmichael's nor Malcolm X's, but his commitment to Christianity offered him no outlet in the rhetoric of violence. During this period, the sermons reflect a gradual relinquishing of personalist themes, fewer assurances from the old homiletical standbys, and an outright disgust for the hypocrisy of American civil religion. The black gospel tradition reasserts itself as the dominant force in his preaching and life. At the end, he is no longer confidently reciting his set piece on the inevitability of justice in America: "The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice." Instead, he is possessed by the God of judgment and deliverance, the God of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob, the God of Denmark Vesey, Nat Turner, and his own religious heritage.[4]

As a result, what we know as "the fatigue of despair,"[5] and which David J. Garrow defined as the last stage of King's spiritual deadlock, was due, Lischer contends, to objective circumstances rather than to his mere individual, morbid mentality.

> White American liberalism embraced the victim but rejected the prophet. It accepted its own guilt but not the radical changes necessary for its liberation. Black America found it increasingly difficult to identify itself as a vessel of redemptive, or unmerited, suffering.... Black America embraced the threatening prophet who predicted long hot summers in their ghettos, condemned the war in Vietnam, and

3. Ibid., 142.
4. Ibid., 108.
5. Ibid., 190.

> demanded a radical redistribution of wealth, but it grew weary with the priestly victim who in his latter years clung ever more tenaciously to suffering and death as the only means of redemption. In negotiating the immense social distance between the prophet's wrath and the messiah's suffering, King became in C. Eric Lincoln's suggestive phrase, "the unbearable symbol." His prophetic edge alienated his liberal white audience; intimations of corporate self-sacrifice worried and puzzled his own people. The split in King's sense of role (and America's religious consciousness) signaled the end of the Civil Rights Movement as a Christian phenomenon.[6]

Nevertheless, the third and the most important essential point of this book is Lischer's contention of King's deepening of his own redemptive faith. According to the author, King inherited this faith from Jewish theologian Abraham Heschel's interpretation of the suffering servant in the Old Testament's Book of Isaiah[7] and from Daniel Coker, who was an associate of the founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Richard Allen.[8]

> It is at this last point where the links between Allen and King appear almost genetic. After King became famous, he would make much of unmerited suffering as a means of spiritual redemption. Although King himself later traced its intellectual lineage to concepts with which he had become familiar in graduate school, the doctrine of unmerited suffering was nowhere more clearly taught than by Allen and one of his associates, a preacher named Daniel Coker. In his *A Dialogue between a Virginian and an African Minister*, written in 1810, Coker creates two symbolic figures, a slaveholding, white Virginian and a distinguished minister of African descent. The African argues that slaves should submit to unjust suffering, as Jesus did, in order to win over the cruel master. Quoting an obedient slave, "I am tied and stretched on the ground as my blessed master was, and suffer the owner of my body to cut my flesh... and bear it without murmuring." The slave's soul is purified through obedience, and the master's heart is changed by the slave's sacrificial witness. By the end of the pamphlet, the Virginian is clearly won over and announces his intention to manumit his fifty-five slaves.[9]

Although I accept the moral power of King's thoroughly conscientious nonviolent action, this African slave's ultimately passive behavior seemed to me beyond understanding. When I visited Prof. Lischer at Duke University in October 2010, I asked him straight up, "Wasn't it too difficult or even too cruel that King counseled his fellow black people to follow Coker's model?" There was

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6. Ibid., 193 f.
7. Ibid., 34.
8. Ibid., 188.
9. Ibid., 34.

a silence for a while and then he answered, "But could any real historical change come true without such an unmerited suffering?"

Next I want to introduce the following work: Clayborne Carson *Martin's Dream: My Journey and the Legacy of Martin Luther King Jr.—A Memoir*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2013.

In this book, the author, reflecting upon his career as the editor of the Martin Luther King, Jr., Papers, and who was selected by Mrs. Coretta Scott King as "serendipitous" because of his participation in the march on Washington at the age of 19, describes what King's legacy meant to him.

And what impressed me most from reading these descriptions was that the author had opened his eyes more now to King's "audacity" to risk his life to the universal and future perspective of humankind, in contrast to his unsatisfactory impression of King's speech as being too modest when he heard it from the standpoint of an SNCC member in 1963. He suggests this "audacity" in the title of the concluding chapter, "An Enduring Dream," and expresses it when describing President Obama's inauguration speech as "somewhat of a letdown."

> .... It was as if his success in winning the nomination and then the presidency had moved him away from the attributes I thought he shared with King and the Movement.[10]

> .... He seemed unwilling to apply King's principles to the political realities he encountered. When he accepted the Nobel Peace Prize in 2008, he mentioned King while at the same time insisting that he could not be guided by King's principles.
>
> > As someone who stands here as a direct consequence of Dr. King's life's work, I am living testimony to the moral force of non-violence. I know there is nothing weak—nothing passive—nothing naïve—in the creed and lives of Gandhi and King. But as a head of state sworn to protect and defend my nation, I cannot be guided by their examples alone. I face the world as it is, and cannot stand idle in the face of threats to the American people. For make no mistake: evil does exist in the world. A non-violent movement could not have halted Hitler's armies. Negotiations cannot convince al Qaeda's leaders to lay down their arms. To say that force is sometimes necessary is not a call to cynicism—it is a recognition of history; the imperfection of man and the limits of reason.[11]

While recognizing this president's cool-headed political realism, Carson invites us to King's radical future-oriented global perspective that he discovered

10. Carson, *Martin's Dream*, 275.
11. Ibid., 276 f.

in the process of editing King's papers. It is, he says, the unwavering consistent perspective of King, from the Montgomery Bus Boycott Movement through the "Dream" speech to the Memphis, Tennessee, address.

> While other black Montgomery leaders limited themselves to clarifying the MIA's immediate goals and plans, Martin galvanized black Montgomery residents by encouraging them to believe that they were part of a struggle with global importance. At the conclusion of his speech, he made an audacious prediction abut the historical importance of the bus boycott: "Right here in Montgomery, when the history books are written in the future, somebody will have to say, 'There lived a race of people, a black people... who had the moral courage to stand up for their rights. And thereby they injected a new meaning into the veins of history and of civilization.'" Martin's sense of history was astounding, given that it was the first day of a boycott that faced concerted opposition from white segregationists and that had not yet directly challenged segregation laws. His stirring oratory helped ensure that the Montgomery movement would indeed become worthy of mention in history books.[12]

> .... When he received the Nobel Peace Prize at the end of 1964, he broke free of some of the constraints that his role as an African American civil rights leader had placed upon him. Many of those who admired him did not recognize that he, like Mohandas K. Gandhi, had transcended the movement and the nation that spawned him. Martin now clearly expressed his "abiding faith in America" as well as his "audacious faith in the future of mankind." He had "the audacity to believe that people everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality, and freedom for their spirits." He saw that the African American struggle for their civil rights was "a relatively small part of a world development."
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> > The deep rumbling of discontent that we hear today is the thunder of disinherited masses, rising from dungeons of oppression to the bright hills of freedom, in one majestic chorus the rising masses singing, in the words of our freedom song, "Ain't gonna let nobody turn us around." All over the world, like a fever, the freedom movement is spreading in the widest liberation in history. The great masses of people are determined to end the exploitation of their races and land. They are awake and moving toward their goal like a tidal wave.[13]

King concluded this Nobel Peace Prize acceptance address by presenting the concept of a "world house." It is, according to Carson, "an idea that has become even more relevant in our era of globalization and Internet communication." And

12. Ibid., 283.
13. Ibid., 285.

the "world house," King explained, was

> the great new problem of mankind. We have inherited a big house, a great "world house" in which we have to live together—black and white, Easterners and Westerners, Gentiles and Jews, Catholics and Protestants, Muslim and Hindu, a family unduly separated in ideas, culture, and interests who, because we can never again live without each other, must learn, somehow, in this one big world, to live with each other.[14]

Finally, what Carson points out conclusively is that King took this global vision to Memphis, Tennessee, in 1968 amidst death threats in order to encourage the city's sanitation workers.

> .... He inspired the strikers by convincing them that their labor struggle was connected to historic liberation struggles throughout the world. Despite seeing the world as "all messed up," he drew attention to positive aspects of what was happening in the world, finding solace in his "panoramic view of the whole of human history up to now."
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> If God gave him the choice, he announced, he would not prefer to live in any previous era—not the biblical Exodus from Egypt, the age of classical Greek philosophy, the "great heyday" of the Roman Empire, the Renaissance and Reformation, the Civil War, or the Great Depression. "Strangely enough, I would turn to the Almighty and say, 'If you allow me to live just a few years in the second half of the twentieth century, I will be happy." Although he acknowledged that he lived in difficult times—"The nation is sick, trouble is in the land, confusion all around"—he still saw reasons for hope:
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> > But I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough can you see the stars. And I see God working in this period of the twentieth century in a way that men in some strange way are responding. Something is happening in our world. The masses of people are rising up. And wherever are assembled today, whether they are in Johannesburg, South Africa; Nairobi, Kenya; Accra, Ghana; New York City; Atlanta, Georgia; Jackson, Mississippi; or Memphis, Tennessee, the cry is always the same: "We want to be free."[15]

The third book I want to introduce is James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 2011. Frankly, this book was sent to me as a response by Dr. Cone, of Union Theological Seminary in New York, to what I had asked him about his impression of *Christian Churches Together in the U.S. A., A Response to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s* "*Letter from Birmingham Jail."*

14. Ibid., 286.
15. Ibid., 287.

The "response" itself, drafted on the 50th anniversary of King's sending of the letter, seemed to me pretty conscientious, but Dr. Cone's evaluation was not so appreciative, and he wanted me to judge it by reading his new book "as it sums up his thinking for the last 40 years."

At first, I wanted to introduce some of the praise of this book by some well-known persons.

> "James Cone has rescued the cross from formulaic theologies of salvation by proxy. His brave book lights fires of inquiry on the mysterious bond between suffering and love. After reading it, no aspiring Christian or christian can pretend that the lynching tree is about someone other than ourselves."—Taylor Branch, author. *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63*.

> "James Cone is a world historical figure in twentieth century Christian theology. *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* is a powerful and painful song of hope in our dance with mortality—a song Cone courageously has led for over forty years! —Cornel West, Princeton University.
> "As James Cone shows, the thousands of black men and women who died on lynching trees were body of Christ crucified all over again. The lynching tree is our American cross. Yet a resistance to racism that bears the cross, as in Martin Luther King's vision, can overcome the lynching tree—and its successors in our slums, prisons and execution chambers. Cone's work is devastating and redemptive—Jim Douglass. author, *JFK and the Unspeakable*.

《The biblical verse and black song hint at the name of this book.》:

"They put him to death by hanging him on a tree." (Acts 10:39: The apostle Peter preaching)

> Southern trees bear strange fruit,
> Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,
> Black body swinging in the Southern breeze,
> Strange fruit hanging from the polar trees.
> —Abel Meeropol (a.k. a Lewis Allen)

《The revelatory event that urged the author's consistent writing work is recounted here.》:

> The struggle to make sense of being *black* and *Christian* in white America has motivated all my work as a theologian, starting in June of 1968, two months after Martin King's assassination, when I began to write *Black Theology and Black*

Power. While writing that book in my brother's church (Union A.M.E. in Little Rock, Arkansas), a place of worship where blacks regularly "caught the spirit," something happened that I can't explain. It seemed as if a transcendent voice were speaking to me through the scriptures and the medium of African American history and culture, reminding me that God's liberation of the poor is the primary theme of Jesus' gospel.[16]

《The author's recollects the complications between his Christian faith and black experience that arose during his boyhood.》:

As a child, I remember worrying about my father when he did not come home from work at the usual time in the evening. My brothers and I would watch anxiously out the window, hoping that the lights from every vehicle would be the lights from his pick-up truck. My mother worried too, but she tried to assure us that "God would protect Daddy from any harm that whites could do to him" and that he would arrive home soon. I wanted to believe that, but I had heard too much about white people killing black people to believe what she said without deep question. When my father would finally make it home safely, I would run and jump into his arms, happy as I could be. For that moment, at least, my faith was renewed.[17]

《The Emmett Till event is a turning point for the civil rights movement in 1950.》:

Only a year after twenty-six-year-old Martin Luther King Jr. began to preach at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, the lynching of fourteen-year-old Emmett Louis "Bo" Till in Mississippi shook the black community in the South and the nation. In a sermon at Dexter, King called the Till lynching "one of the most brutal and inhuman crimes in the twentieth century." Although the U. S. Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision had outlawed segregation in public schools, the Till lynching was a shocking reminder of the enduring power of white supremacy. Because he had whistled at a white woman and reportedly said "bye baby" as he departed from a store on August 24, 1955, Emmett Till was picked up four days later around 2:00 A.M., beaten beyond recognition, shot in the head, and thrown in the Tallahatchie River, "weighed down with a heavy gin fan."[18]

《Mamie Till Bradley, Emmett Till's mother, responded in a militant manner.》:

16. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 154.
17. Ibid., 153.
18. Ibid., 65 f.

> If anything was remarkable about the Till lynching, it was not so much the callousness of the deed as the militant response it evoked. If lynching was intended to instill silence and passivity, this event had the opposite effect, inspiring blacks to rise in defiance, to cast off centuries of paralyzing fear. The signal of this change was marked by the actions of Mamie Till Bradley, Emmett's mother, who refused to allow this heinous act, like so many similar cases, to remain in the shadows or to fade from public memory. When Emmett's body was brought back to Chicago, she insisted that the sealed casket be opened for a three-day viewing, exposing "his battered and bloated corpse" so that "everybody can see what they did to my boy." She exposed white brutality and black faith to the world and, significantly, expressed a parallel meaning between her son's lynching and the crucifixion of Jesus. "Lord you gave your son to remedy a condition," she cried out, "but who knows, but what the death of my only son might bring an end to lynching."[19]

《The significance of Emmett Till's death is noted here.》:

> It was as if she was pleading with God to let her son's death count for something — to help save other black boys from Emmett's fate. "Darling, you have not died in vain," she said to Emmett, as she "looked at that horribly mangled monstrosity"; "your life has been sacrificed for something." Six hundred thousand people viewed his bruised body and attended the funeral, and many millions more saw the *Jet* magazine photos that traveled around the world. "This is not for Emmett," Mrs. Bradley said, "because my boy can't be helped now, but to make it safe for other boys. Unless an example is made of the lynchers of Emmett, it won't be safe for a Negro to walk the streets anywhere in America."[20]

《The deep relationship of the Rosa Parks event with the Emmett Till incident is noted here.》:

> We do not know what really happened in Mrs. Bradley's revelatory experience; its meaning remains locked in mystery. What we do know is that her spirit of resistance caught fire in black communities throughout the nation, justifying the claim of author Clenora Hudson-Weems that Emmett was "the sacrificial lamb of the civil rights movement." Only three months after the Till lynching, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a city bus in Montgomery, and a "New Negro" was born. Rather than ride segregated buses in humiliation, blacks decided to walk the streets with pride until the walls of segregation, like the Jerico walls, "come tumblin' down."[21]

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19. Ibid., 66 f.
20. Ibid., 67.
21. Ibid., 69.

《That no white theologian made a reference to the lynching of Emmett Till is recounted.》:

King referred to this Emmett Till incident in his sermon "Pride versus Humility; The Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican," on September 25, 1955, in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr*., 6 vols.; Clayborne Carson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1882–2007), 6: 232.[22]

> In contrast, my research has not discovered one white theologian of the time who made a reference to the lynching of Emmett Till. They were much more likely to reference European theology—Barth, Bultmann, Tillich, and the New Quest of the Historical Jesus—than to comment on the violence against blacks in the 1950s and 60s.[23]

《The theological blindness of white theologians is underlined.》:

> White theologians in the past century have written thousands of books about Jesus' cross without remarking on the analogy between the crucifixion of Jesus and the lynching of the black people. One must suppose that in order to feel comfortable in the Christian faith, whites needed theologians to interpret the gospel in a way that would not require them to acknowledge white supremacy as America's great sin. Churches, seminaries, and theological academies separated Christian identity from the horrendous violence committed against black people. Whites could claim a Christian identity without feeling the need to oppose slavery, segregation, and lynching as a contradiction of the gospel for America. Whether we speak of Jonathan Edwards, Walter Rauschenbusch, or Reinhold Niebuhr as America's greatest theologian, none of them made the rejection of white supremacy central to their understanding of the gospel. Reinhold Niebuhr could write and preach about the cross with profound theological imagination and say nothing of how the violence of white supremacy invalidated the faith of white churches. It takes a lot of theological blindness to do that, especially since the vigilantes were white Christians who claimed to worship the Jew lynched in Jerusalem.[24]

《Black people's understanding of the cross was born of their life of terror.》:

> What is invisible to white Christians and their theologians is inescapable to black people. The cross is a reminder that the world is fraught with many contradictions—many lynching trees. We cannot forget the terror of the lynching tree no

22. Ibid., 181, Chap. 3, note 1.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., 159.

matter how hard we try. It is buried deep in the living memory and psychology of the black experience in America. We can go to churches and celebrate our religious heritage, but the tragic memory of the black holocaust in America's history is still waiting to find theological meaning. When black people sing about Jesus' cross, they often think of black lives lost to the lynching tree. Through their own experience of suffering, African Americans have often found themselves existentially at the foot of Jesus' cross, experiencing his fate, believing that only Jesus understands their lot because he suffered as they have.

Look-a how dey done my Lord,
Look-a how they done my Lord,
Look-a how dey done my Lord,
Oh, look-a how dey done my Lord,
Done my Lord, done my Lord,
Done my Lord, done my Lord.[25]

《The cross and the lynching tree interpret each other.》:

The cross and the lynching tree interpret each other. Both were public spectacles, shameful events, instruments of punishments reserved for the most despised people in society. Any genuine theology and any genuine preaching of the Christian gospel must be measured against the test of the scandal of the cross and the lynching tree. "Jesus did not die a gentle death like Socrates, with his cup of hemlock.... Rather, he died like a [lynched black victim] or a common [black] criminal in torment, on the tree of shame." The crowd's shout "Crucify him!" (Mk 15: 14) anticipated the white mob's shout "Lynch him! Jesus' agonizing final cry of abandonment from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk 15: 34), was similar to the lynched victim Sam Hose's awful scream as he drew his last breath, "Oh, my God! Oh, Jesus." In each case, it was a cruel, agonizing, and contemptible death.

Can the cross redeem the lynching tree? Can the lynching tree liberate the cross and make it real in American history? Those are the questions I have tried to answer.[26]

《The lynching tree is seen as freeing the cross from the false pieties of well-meaning Christians.》:

As I see it, the lynching tree frees the cross from the false pieties of well-meaning Christians. When we see the crucifixion as a first-century lynching, we are confronted by the reenactment of Christ's suffering in the blood-soaked history of African Americans. Thus, the lynching tree reveals the true religious meaning of

25. Ibid., 159 f.
26. Ibid., 161.

the cross for American Christians today. The cross needs the lynching tree to remind Americans of the reality of suffering—to keep the cross from becoming a symbol of abstract, sentimental piety. Before the spectacle of this cross we are called to more than contemplation and adoration. We are faced with a clear challenge: as Latin American liberation theologian Jon Sobrino has put it, "to take the crucified down from the cross."[27]

《And the cross gives the lynching tree God's liberating presence.》:

Yet the lynching tree also needs the cross, without which it becomes simply an abomination. It is the cross that points in the direction of hope, the confidence that there is dimension to life beyond the reach of the oppressor. "Do not fear those who kill the body, and after can do nothing more" (Lk 12: 4).

Though the pain of Jesus' cross was real, there was also joy and beauty in his cross. This is the great theological paradox that makes the cross impossible to embrace unless one is standing in solidarity with those who are powerless. God's loving solidarity can transform ugliness—whether Jesus on the cross or a lynched black victim—into beauty, into God's liberating presence. Through the powerful imagination of faith we can discover the "terrible beauty" of the cross and the "tragic beauty" of the lynching tree.[28]

《Lynching behavior is taking place in America today in the criminal justice system.》:

… Where is the gospel of Jesus' cross revealed today? The lynching of black America is taking place in the criminal justice system where nearly one-third of black men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-eight are in prisons, jails, on parole, or waiting for their day in court. Nearly one-half of the more than two million people in prison are black. That is one million black people behind bars, more than in colleges. Through private prisons and the "war against drugs," whites have turned the brutality of their racist legal system into a profit-making venture for dying white towns and cities throughout America. Michelle Alexander correctly calls America's criminal justice system "the new Jim Crow." "The criminalization and demonization of black men," writes Alexander, "is one habit that America seems unlikely to break without addressing head-on the racial dynamics that have given rise to our latest caste system. Nothing is more racist in America's criminal justice system than its administration of the death penalty. America is the only industrialized country in the West where the death penalty is still legal. Most countries regard it as both immoral and barbaric. But not in America. The death

27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., 161 f.

penalty is primarily reserved, though not exclusively, for people of color, and white supremacy shows no signs of changing it. That is why the term "legal lynching" is still relevant today. One can lynch a person without a rope or tree.[29]

《The hate that produces lynching has not been solved yet.》:

People who have never been lynched by another group usually find it difficult to understand why blacks want whites to remember lynching atrocities. Why bring that up? Is it not best forgotten? Absolutely not! What happened to the hate that created the violence that lynched people? Did it disappear? What happened to the hate that created the violence that lynched black people? Did it disappear? What happened to the hate that lynched Henry Smith in Texas (1892), John Carter in Arkansas (1927), and Reverend George W. Lee and Lemar Smith in Mississippi (1955)? Where did the hate go that opposed the black freedom movement and killed Martin Luther King Jr. and a host of white and black civil rights workers?[30]

《The true relationship of solidarity between blacks and whites is revealed.》:

Just as the Germans should never forget the Holocaust, Americans should never forget slavery, segregation, and the lynching tree.... Because Emmett Till was remembered, the civil rights movement was born. When we remember, we give voice to the victims. Many white religious leaders, scholars, and churches have done everything they can to forget the vigilante violence unleashed on African Americans. But other white and black scholars, especially historians and writers, are helping us to remember....

The cross of Jesus and the lynching tree of black victims are not literally the same—historically or theologically. Yet these two symbols or images are closely linked to Jesus' spiritual meaning for black and white life together in what historian Robert Handy has called "Christian America." Blacks and whites are bound together in Christ by their brutal and beautiful encounter in this land. Neither blacks nor whites can be understood fully without reference to the other because of their common religious heritage as well as their joint relationship to the lynching experience. What happened to blacks also happened to whites. When whites lynched blacks, they were literally and symbolically lynching themselves—their sons, daughters, cousins, mothers and fathers, and a host of other relatives. Whites may be bad brothers and sisters, murderers of their own black kin, but they are *still* our sisters and brothers. We are bound together in America by faith and tragedy. All the hatred we have expressed toward one another cannot destroy the profound mutual love and solidarity that flow deeply between us—a love that empowered

29. Ibid., 163.
30. Ibid., 164.

blacks to open their arms to receive the many whites who were also empowered by the same love to risk their lives in the black struggle for freedom. No two people in America have had more violent and loving encounters than black and white people. We were made brothers and sisters by the blood of the lynching tree, the blood of sexual union, and the blood of the cross of Jesus. No gulf between blacks and whites is too great to overcome, for our beauty is more enduring than our brutality. What God joined together, no one can tear apart.[31]

《Black people are Christ figures because they have had no other choice.》:

The lynching tree is a metaphor for white America's crucifixion of black people. It is the window that best reveals the religious meaning of the cross in our land. In this sense, black people are Christ figures, not because they wanted to suffer but because they had no choice. Just as Jesus had no choice in his journey to Calvary, so black people had no choice about being lynched. The evil forces of the Roman state and of white supremacy in America willed it. Yet, God took the evil of the cross and the lynching tree and transformed them both into the triumphant beauty of the divine. If America has the courage to confront the great sin and ongoing legacy of white supremacy with repentance and reparation there is hope "beyond tragedy."[32]

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31. Ibid., 165 f.
32. Ibid., 166.